



RHODE ISLAND FED

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THE ROAD BACK FROM KATRINA

The long recovery from Hurricane Katrina continues. The storm's wrath affected every aspect of life in New Orleans, including its law enforcement community. Post-storm desertion by police officers, rampant crime, and a courthouse being run out of a Greyhound bus station – all contributed to a need for federal resources to help the city repair its law enforcement community.

To help the law enforcement recovery, the U.S. Department of Justice sent six federal



Stairway to nowhere: Where there was a house in New Orleans is now only an empty staircase to nowhere.

prosecutors to New Orleans from other districts. Among them was Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard W. Rose of Rhode Island, who spent a year in New Orleans. In addition to the six prosecutors, 50 federal agents from the FBI, ATF, DEA, the U.S. Marshals Service, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement were dispatched to New Orleans. Relying on concurrent federal jurisdiction over drug and gun crimes, federal prosecutors assumed much of the local caseload.

The August 2005 storm created many issues for law enforcement. For instance, in one murder trial much of the evidence had to be presented by way of photographs, because Katrina had destroyed the New Orleans Police Department evidence locker and all the pre-Katrina evidence contained in it. Thus, while prosecutors argued that a picture showed a victim's blood on a tee shirt, defense lawyers argued that it was merely mud. The trial resulted in a conviction.

New Orleans U.S. Attorney James B. Letten said the additional help was essential. "Without the resources of the United States Attorney's Office and the contributions of agents and prosecutors from around the country, basic civil law and order would not have been possible in post-Katrina New Orleans. Our tremendous (continued on page 3)

FEDERAL DRUG CASES

Former Latin King RICO offender admits to drug and firearms offenses

Karim Abdullah was released from federal prison in 2006, having served a sentence for street gang racketeering, and went into the drug trafficking business. Rhode Island State Police and Providence Police detectives executed a search warrant at Abdullah's Carpenter Street apartment. They seized crack cocaine and four handguns. Abdullah pleaded guilty to drug trafficking and being a felon in possession of firearms. A member of the Latin Kings street gang, Abdullah had served a 115-month sentence imposed in 1997 for witness intimidation and racketeering. Twelve other gang members went to prison —

five for life — for gang-related murders and other offenses that were the focus of a multi-agency investigation called Operation Checkmate. *Assistant U.S. Attorney Kenneth P. Madden.*



Five guilty in conspiracies involving 29 kilograms of cocaine, \$129,000 in cash

In cell phone conversations, **Omar Altamarino-Nunez**, who used the alias Juan Carlos, discussed with **Adolfo Verdugo** the delivery of a shipment of cocaine from California. Speaking in Spanish and in thinly veiled code, Verdugo told Altamarino-Nunez to meet him "where the Simpsons live," referring to Springfield, Massachusetts and the cartoon characters who live in a fictional Springfield. Altamarino-Nunez recruited two cohorts in Providence — **Idelfonso Betancourt-Rodriguez**, known as Chacho, and **Rafael Fernandez-Roque** — and the three drove to Springfield in two vehicles, one a Jeep Cherokee. At a rest area along I-91 north of Springfield, the Cherokee rendezvoused with a semi that Verdugo owned, his name emblazoned on the door of the cab. DEA agents and Massachusetts



Adolfo Verdugo's truck, which transported produce, plus 29 kilograms of cocaine

state troopers stopped the Cherokee after it left the rest area, seized a bag containing bricks of cocaine totaling 29 kilograms, and arrested Chacho and Fernandez-Roque. Questioned back at the rest area, Verdugo claimed that he was delivering a shipment of produce to a Massachusetts location, and, indeed, the trailer was loaded with produce, but minus its recent cargo of cocaine. One of four cell phones in Verdugo's truck had communicated with Altamarino-Nunez's cell phone, but, because agents wanted the investigation to continue, Verdugo was allowed to leave. He was later

arrested in California. A jury convicted Verdugo and Fernandez-Roque; Altamarino-Nunez and Betancourt-Rodriguez pleaded guilty. Also pleading guilty — **Juan Manuel Casillas**, who had flown to Rhode Island to pick up a truck containing \$129,000 in proceeds from previous cocaine shipments. Rhode Island state troopers seized that truck and the cash. *Assistant U.S. Attorney Mary E. Rogers.* □

FEDERAL GUN CASES

Cranston gun dealer pleads guilty to facilitating straw purchasing

Anthony Mancini was a licensed gun dealer who ran Continental Gun Engraving on Park Avenue in Cranston. He sold three guns to undercover federal agents, while documenting that the sales were actually to another person, an illegal practice known as straw purchasing that is often employed by individuals who are barred by federal law from buying guns. On one occasion, the actual purchaser told Mancini that he had prior felony convictions, but Mancini proceeded with the sale, and falsely documented that he had sold the gun to a female companion of the buyer, who was also an undercover federal agent. Mancini pleaded guilty to violating federal laws requiring documentation of gun sales. *Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephen G. Dambruch.* □



PROSECUTORS AID KATRINA RECOVERY *(continued from page 1)*

staff was bolstered by highly committed and selfless prosecutors from around the United States. They made personal sacrifices to leave their homes and serve on details in an effort to ensure the survival and recovery of our city and region during the most critical challenge in our history.”

Katrina frayed the city’s social fabric. A year after the storm, the whirl of Army helicopter blades could still be heard in the day and nighttime skies above the city. Even now, National Guardsmen patrol some of the hardest hit areas, and the Police Chief’s office is still based in a FEMA trailer.

Post-Katrina New Orleans has a population slightly larger than that of Providence, about 250,000 people, compared to Providence’s 170,000. Starkly different murder rates tell the story: in 2007, Providence had 11 murders and New Orleans 209.



*A storm ravaged home in New Orleans,
two years after Katrina.*

While some of the city’s neighborhoods, such as the French Quarter, the Garden District, and uptown St. Charles Avenue, have returned to pre-Katrina vibrancy, in other areas, people are still living in FEMA trailers. Housing demolition debris remains uncollected, some major hotels and office buildings remain empty, and many displaced New Orleans residents still await their fate.

When asked what the most compelling memory of his service in New Orleans was, Rose said, “I can only now begin to appreciate how thin the line is between social order and anarchy.” □

CRIMINAL DOCKET SHEET

Prison sentences imposed in check fraud scheme

A federal judge sentenced **John Perras** to 51 months in prison, and a codefendant, **David Chavez**, to eight months for a check fraud scheme that targeted corporate accounts at Citizens Bank. Chavez, who worked at the bank, obtained account data for Perras, who manufactured counterfeit checks on personal computers belonging to two codefendants — **Saffiya Abdulla** and **Jason Turcios**. The checks were made payable to Turcios, Abdulla, and three other defendants, who cashed the checks at Citizens, or deposited them in accounts at other banks and then withdrew cash. The defendants obtained more than \$83,000, and attempted to obtain an additional \$16,500. From a house where Perras was staying, Secret Service agents seized an additional 15 counterfeit checks, payable for more than \$325,000. Abdullah was sentenced to six months in prison and six months home confinement, and Turcios to a year in prison. *Assistant U.S. Attorney Sandra R. Beckner.*



Bank robbery nets a 13-year sentence for a career offender

Stephen Davidow committed a “note job” robbery at the Webster Bank branch on Newport Avenue in Pawtucket. He fled with \$2,400, but was arrested a week later after Pawtucket Police received information linking him to the robbery, and after a teller identified him from an array of photographs. He pleaded guilty and, because of several prior violent felonies, was sentenced as a career offender to 156 months in federal prison. A defendant who commits a violent felony or drug offense, and who has at least two prior convictions for violent felonies or drug offenses, is considered a career offender under sentencing guidelines, and is subject to an enhanced sentence. Davidow’s sentence was almost twice what it would otherwise have been under sentencing guidelines. *Assistant U.S. Attorney Zechariah Chafee.*



Two recently released felons admit bank robbery

Christopher Thibodeau had been out of prison for six weeks, and **Dennis Evans** about nine months, when they committed a robbery at a BankRI branch in Cranston. The robbers entered the bank and barred the door with a steering wheel locking bar called “The Club.” They fled in a stolen car but abandoned it in an industrial area near I-295, and fled on foot. A Cranston Police officer responding to the robbery saw two men, wearing masks, run across the highway. Police officers from several departments searched a wooded area off the highway and arrested both men. Evans was found lying on the ground over a bag full of cash. Police recovered all but \$75 of the \$37,553 taken in the robbery. *Assistant U.S. Attorney Kenneth P. Madden.* □



CIVIL DOCKET SHEET

Physician pays \$50,000 for irregularities in his drug inventory

Ralph A. DiGiacomo, M.D., maintained a medical practice on Toll Gate Road in Warwick. An inspection in March 2007 by the Rhode Island Board of Pharmacy revealed that Dr. DiGiacomo had failed to maintain records of the inventory and dispensing of nearly 86,000 pills of hydrocodone that he'd ordered between 2002 and 2006. The inspection also determined that Dr. DiGiacomo had removed hydrocodone from the medical practice and taken it to his residence in West Kingston. A week after the inspection, DEA agents seized 2,400 hydrocodone tablets from DiGiacomo's home. Agents also seized other medications: 1000 tablets of Soma and a 100-count bottle of Librium. Dr. DiGiacomo conceded that he had failed to properly maintain pharmaceutical inventory records, and paid the United States \$50,000. He lost his license to practice for a year, and a condition of its reinstatement is that he comply with the terms of an agreement with the U.S. Attorney and the DEA. *Assistant U.S. Attorney John P. McAdams.* □



“STREET SMARTS” REACHES 7,000 STUDENTS

The U.S. Attorney's Anti-Gang presentation, “Street Smarts,” has reached 7,000 students in 52 schools and 14 youth groups in Rhode Island.



Begun in 2006, Street Smarts opens with a chilling “Roll Call” of young people killed by violence since 1994. The names of the victims, all age 30 or younger, scroll up a screen as a New Orleans funeral dirge plays in the background.

The Street Smarts message is twofold: to debunk myths that gang life is romantic and rewarding, and to show young people that there are alternatives to the gangster path.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard W. Rose, the anti-gang coordinator for the U.S. Attorney's Office, has brought the presentation to high schools and middle schools in Providence, Cranston, Pawtucket, Woonsocket, Warwick, West Warwick, and East Greenwich.

Pictures of drug dealer's squalid apartments put the lie to myths that gangsters “live large.” And a list of gang members who have gone to prison — life sentences for career drug traffickers, imprisonment for gun and explosives offenses — also belies the mythical romance of gang life.

To demonstrate alternatives to gang life, the presentation identifies successful professionals — lawyers, doctors, college professors — who grew up in poor neighborhoods, made the right choices, and are leading productive lives. □

ANTI-TERRORISM: 9/11 VICTIMS RECALLED

ASSISTANT U.S. ATTORNEY LEE H. VILKER

In a poignant and emotional presentation, United States Attorney Chuck Rosenberg of the Eastern District of Virginia recently reminded an audience at the Naval War College of the painful memories we carry from 9/11. In a presentation concerning the prosecution of Zacarias Moussaoui for his role in the run-up to those attacks, Mr. Rosenberg focused on the victim impact portion of the Moussaoui trial rather than the legal strategies of the prosecution.

Rosenberg played recordings of calls to 911 operators from victims trapped in the World Trade Center, begging the operators to send messages to their loved ones, and other calls from passengers aboard hijacked airplanes saying good-bye to their loved ones.

In a telling moment, Rosenberg displayed a collage of pictures of almost all of the 9/11 victims. By focusing his presentation on the victims of the worst terrorist attack in U.S. history, Rosenberg demonstrated the importance of the effort against terrorism that we continue to press every day.



Zacarias Moussaoui

Moussaoui was arrested in Minnesota in the summer of 2001, after instructors at a flight

school became suspicious and contacted the FBI. He is serving six life sentences for conspiracy to commit acts of terrorism, conspiracy to commit air piracy, and related offenses.



U.S. Attorney Rosenberg (center), with (left to right) Assistant U.S. Attorney Lee H. Vilker, U.S. Attorney Robert Clark Corrente, First Assistant U.S. Attorney Luis M. Matos and Intelligence Specialist Brian J. Pires

The Naval War College sponsored the forum, and invited members of the U.S. Attorney's Anti-Terrorism Advisory Council. Among those in attendance, in addition to U.S. Attorney's staff, were Warwick Police, Rhode Island State Police, the Federal Security Director for the Transportation Security Administration, and the Agent in Charge of the Providence Office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. □



WORK ON BEHALF OF CRIME VICTIMS RECOGNIZED



Coventry Detective Marcos Saenko, at a ceremony recognizing work on behalf of victims — Detective Saenko worked with Secret Service Special Agent Craig Marech and Assistant U.S. Attorney Lee Vilker on U.S. v. Stepanian et.al., a case in which supermarket customers' account information was compromised through altered PIN-pad scanners.



With U.S. Attorney Robert Clark Corrente, center, is the task force that investigated John Curran, a natural healer who sold bogus treatment plans: left to right, FDA Special Agent Jason Simonian, Robert Ferraro, IRS Criminal Investigations, Assistant U.S. Attorney Luis M. Matos, Postal Inspector Stephen Souza, Johnston Detective Albert Faella, Postal Inspector Almino Correia, and North Providence Detective Timothy Heston.



Flanking U.S. Attorney Corrente: Assistant R.I. Attorney General Alan Goulart (for Feidlim Gill), FBI Special Agents Andrew Yesnowski and Michael Kohn, and Middletown Detective William Swierk. They were recognized for their work on U.S. v. Zurybida, a case involving child sexual exploitation. Not pictured: Assistant U.S. Attorney Terrence P. Donnelly

Pipe Bomb attack

Also recognized: a team that investigated U.S. v. Soundara, et.al., a gang-related pipe bomb attack that maimed the mother of an intended target: ATF — Special Agent Michael Payne & Intelligence Analyst Gregory Luchka of RING; FBI — Special Agent Justin Bowers and Intelligence Analyst Cory Soderlund of RING; Cranston Police Detective Kevin Grant; Deputy Rhode Island Fire Marshal David Curran; and Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard W. Rose.

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